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United States Department of Agriculture

Soil Conservation Service
Program Aid 1263

Save Fuel . . . Use Conservation Tillage



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1

If you are serious about saving fuel, give conservation tillage a closer look. Farmers who have switched from conventional tillage have reduced their fuel use as much as 80 percent by using no-till, the most fuel-efficient type of conservation tillage.

Conservation tillage saves fuel mainly because fewer trips are made over the field, horsepower requirements are lower, and less equipment is needed to plant a crop.

Until recently, farmers considered the fuel savings to be only a minor byproduct of the improved water conservation and erosion control provided by conservation tillage. With no-till, in which all the residue is left on the surface, soil loss can be reduced as much as 90 percent. On steep slopes or highly erodible soils, other conservation practices may also be needed.

Conserving soil, water, and fuel is a great idea, many farmers say, but they want to know how



2



3

conservation tillage affects crop yields and damage from weeds, insects, and disease.

Compared to conventional tillage, yields with conservation tillage generally are the same or higher. Herbicides are available—if needed—that will control most problem weeds, and field experience with conservation tillage has indicated no significant increase in damage from insects and diseases. Like any other successful farming system, conservation tillage requires proper timing of field operations, careful adjustment and maintenance of equipment, and a close watch for insect and other problems.

If no-till is not appropriate for your farm, check out other conservation tillage systems, such as strip-tillage and till-plant systems. For help in planning a conservation tillage system that is right for your farm, call or visit the local office of your conservation district or the Soil Conservation Service. Assistance is available to everyone without regard to race, creed, color, sex, or national origin.



4a



4b



4c

1. Conservation tillage increases the amount of organic matter in the soil, causes less soil compaction than conventional tillage, and allows better infiltration of moisture and nutrients. Through conservation tillage and good management practices, you can use less fuel, get the same or better yields, save time and labor, conserve water, and control erosion.
2. No-till farming: seed, fertilize, and apply pesticide (if needed) in one trip over the field.
3. No-till corn planted in barley stubble. Where growing season and water supplies are favorable, double cropping with conservation tillage can increase your income.
4. Fluted coulter (a), seeding disk with depth gage band (b), and covering disk (c). If no-till planting equipment is properly adjusted and maintained, seed is placed at a uniform depth. Crop residue can prevent contact between soil and seed if, for example, the planter is not level or the coulter edge is worn.



Soybeans in wheat straw 5 weeks after planting. By reducing runoff, the crop residue cuts erosion and enables more efficient use of fertilizers, pesticides, and other expensive farm chemicals.

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